

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8831

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6830

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: THEY'RE OFF IN GUJARAT\*

REF: NEW DELHI 6576

SUMMARY: THE GUJARAT STATE ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS MOVED INTO HIGH GEAR. MRS. GANDHI IS FOLLOWING AN AMBITIOUS CAMPAIGN SCHEDULE. THE MORARJI DESAI LED "JANATA" OR "PEOPLE'S" FRONT IS SHOWING A SURPRISING DEGREE OF UNITY AFTER INITIAL CLASHES OVER A JOINT ELECTION SYMBOL. MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS-R ENJOYS FORMIDABLE OUTSIDE SUPPORT, INCLUDING CONSIDERABLE FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES BUT HAS ORGANIZATIONAL WEAKNESSES AND LACKS CAPABLE STATE LEADERSHIP. WE ARE RELUCTANT TO HAZARD A GUESS ON THE ELECTION OUTCOME, ALTHOUGH CONGEN BOMBAY ANTICIPATES A "PEOPLE'S" FRONT PLURALITY. SEVERAL CONCLUSIONS, HOWEVER, ARE IN ORDER. (A) IN AN IMPORTANT "TEST CASE" FOR OPPOSITION UNITY, THE TWO LARGEST OPPOSITION PARTIES IN GUJARAT HAVE PASSED THE CERTAINTY OF A CONGRESS DEFEAT BY FAILING TO POOL THEIR RESOURCES AND CHOOSING INSTEAD TO TRY AND MAXIMIZE THEIR OWN  
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STRENGTHS IN THE NEXT ASSEMBLY; AND (B) A SIZABLE CONGRESS

VOTE WILL LOWER MRS. GANDHI'S AND HER PARTY'S PRESTIGE, POSSIBLY ENCOURAGE NOW DORMANT INTRA-CONGRESS DISSENSION AND REINFORCE OPPOSITION UNITY IN THE UP COMING MONTHS BEFORE THE NEXT NATIONAL ELECTIONS. A CONGRESS VICTORY WILL PRODUCE THE OPPOSITE RESULT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GUJARAT ELECTION CAMPAIGN MOVED INTO HIGH GEAR LAST WEEKEND WITH THE FINALIZATION OF THE CANDIDATES LIST. 480 NOMINEES OF TEN PARTIES PLUS 372 INDEPENDENTS WILL CONTEST 182 SEATS. THE MAIN COMPETITION WILL BE TRIANGULAR: (A) THE "JANATA" OR "PEOPLE'S" FRONT (THE CONGRESS-O, WHICH HAS A SUBSTANTIAL FOLLOWING, AND THE JANA SANGH, BHARTIYA LOK DAL, SOCIALIST PARTY AND NATIONAL LABOR PARTY, ALL WITH RELATIVELY SMALL FOLLOWINGS); (B) EX-CHIEF MINISTER CHIMANBHAI PATEL'S KISAN MAZDOOR LOK PAKSHA (KMLP), AN UNABASHEDLY LARGE FARMERS' PARTY, AND MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS-R.

2. MRS. GANDHI AND HER PARTY ARE ALREADY LAUNCHED ON AN ALL-OUT EFFORT TO GET TO THE GUJARATI VOTER. ON MAY 19 AND 20, THE PRIME MINISTER BARNSTORMED THROUGH THREE GUJARAT DISTRICTS. IN HER SPEECHES SHE EMPHASIZED THAT CONGRESS-R IS THE ONLY PARTY CAPABLE OF PROVIDING STABILITY AT THE CENTER AS WELL AS GUJARAT AND THAT THE "PEOPLE'S" FRONT UNITY IS SUPERFICIAL, OPPORTUNISTIC AND DESIGNED ONLY TO REDUCE THE PRO-CONGRESS-R VOTE RATHER THAN TO OFFER A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO CONGRESS RULE. OTHER MORE MINOR THEMES INCLUDED THE DANGERS POSED BY ARMS BUILDUPS AROUND INDIA AND HER GOVERNMENT'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS SYMBOLIZED BY THE BANGLADESH VICTORY, INDIA'S 1974 ATOMIC EXPLOSION AND THE RECENT LAUNCHING OF AN INDIAN SATELLITE. CONGRESS-R HEAD-QUARTERS IN NEW DELHI HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT MRS. GANDHI WILL VISIT 31 CONSTITUENCIES AND ADDRESS 90 PUBLIC MEETINGS DURING THE TWO-AND-A-HALF WEEKS PRECEDING THE POOLING ON JUNE 8 AND JUNE 11. HIGH LEVEL CONGRESS POLITICIANS BELONGING TO ALL COMMUNITIES REPRESENTED IN GUJARAT WILL ALSO CAMPAIGN IN THE STATE. CONGRESS-R FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES ARE REPORTEDLY ALREADY FLOWING INTO PLACE. THE CONGRESS HIGH COMMAND HAS PROVIDED THE MAHARAJA OF BARODA WITH AN ASSEMBLY TICKET AND WHAT BARODA PRIVATELY SAYS IS A PROMISE TO MAKE HIM CHIEF MINISTER SHOULD CONGRESS

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WIN. THE MAHARAJA IS AN INFLUENTIAL RAJPUT PRINCE WHOSE OLD STATE COVERS NO LESS THAN 38 ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCIES.

3. THE CONGRESS FACES AN UPHILL CLIMB IN THE ELECTIONEERING OFFENSIVE, DESPITE ITS ADVANTAGES OF SUPERIOR RESOURCES AND PRIME MINISTER GHANDHI'S FORMIDABLE CAMPAIGNING SKILLS. THE MORARJI DESAI-LED "PEOPLE'S" FRONT HAS SO FAR SHOWN A SURPRISING DEGREE OF UNITY. IT HAS SUCCESSFULLY RALLIED TO

ITS SUPPORT MOST OF THE ELEMENTS WHICH SPEARHEADED LAST YEAR'S ANTI-CONGRESS UPHEAVALS. IT IS ARGUING THAT THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THESE ELEMENTS AND OTHER NON-PARTISAN, PRO-J.P. NARAYAN GROUPS MAKE THE FRONT QUALITATIVELY DIFFERENT FROM THE DISCREDITED "GRAND ALLIANCE" OF 1967. BY CONTRAST, THE GUJARAT CONGRESS-R ORGANIZATION IS YET TO RECOVER FROM THE DEBILITATING EFFECTS OF THE 1974 STUDENT-LED REBELLION. IT CONTINUES TO SUFFER FROM A LACK OF CREDIBLE HIGH-LEVEL STATE LEADERSHIP. THE LARGE NUMBER OF NEW FACES AMONG CONGRESS CANDIDATES ARE MERELY SECOND ECHELON PARTY WORKERS ATTACHED TO STILL COMPETING FACTION LEADERS. FURTHER, THE KMLP IS ESSENTIALLY A BREAKAWAY GROUP OF THE CONGRESS-R WITH A SIMILAR SUPPORT BASE. ITS APPEAL MAY DEFLECT VOTERS WHO WOULD OTHERWISE SUPPORT CONGRESS-R CANDIDATES.

4. WHILE OUR CONGEN COLLEAGUES IN BOMBAY ARE PREDICTING A "PEOPLE'S" FRONT PLURALITY ON THE BASIS OF THESE FACTORS, WE HESITATE TO DRAW ANY CONCLUSIONS. CASTE, REGIONAL AND PRINCELY POLITICS, MONEY AND ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY WILL AS ALWAYS PLAY A MAJOR ROLE AND MAY YET PROVE TO BE THE OLD, RELIABLE VOTE-GETTERS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST. OR THEY MAY NOT. THE GUJARATI VOTER IS REPUTED TO BE MORE UNPREDICTABLE AND NON-CONFORMIST THAN HIS COUNTER-PARTS IN MOST OTHER STATES. GUJARAT'S URBANIZATION AND LITERACY RATES (28 PERCENT AND 39 PERCENT RESPECTIVELY) ARE AMONG THE HIGHEST IN INDIA. IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WHAT EFFECT THE CONTINUING DROUGHT WILL HAVE ON THE GUJARATI VOTER, DESPITE LARGE RELIEF RESOURCES THE CENTER IS POURING INTO THE STATE TO ASSUAGE LOCAL CONCERNS.

5. WE ARE, HOWEVER, READY TO CONCLUDE THAT THE CONTRADICTIONS AMONG THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN GUJARAT HAVE ONCE AGAIN RULED OUT PROSPECTS FOR A CREDIBLE OPTION TO CONGRESS RULE IN AN IMPORTANT "TEST CASE" OF OPPOSITION COHESION. IF THE PEOPLE'S FRONT AND PATEL'S KMLP HAD JOINED FORCES,  
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CONGRESS WOULD HAVE STOOD VIRTUALLY NO CHANCES OF WINNING THE ELECTION.

6. BUT AS MRS. GANDHI KNOWS, THE DECISION OF THE GUJARAT VOTER WILL BE READ WIDELY IN INDIA. A SIZABLE ANTI-CONGRESS VOTE DENYING HER PARTY A MAJORITY OR EVEN A PLURALITY WILL BE SEEN AS A PROTEST VOTE AGAINST CONGRESS RULE EVEN THOUGH NO OTHER PARTY WINS A MAJORITY. IT WILL LOWER CONGRESS PRESTIGE AND MRS. GANDHI'S OWN IMAGE IN THE COUNTRY, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF HER PERSONAL INTENSIVE CAMPAIGNING. IT COULD EMBOLDEN HER CRITICS IN THE CONGRESS. IT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY REINFORCE OPPOSITION EFFORTS TO FORGE MORE UNITY IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT LOK SABHA ELECTIONS. A CONGRESS VICTORY, ON THE OTHER HAND, WILL BE A STRONG WHIFF OF GUNPOWDER FOR THE CONGRESS ORGANIZATION AT THE

CENTER AND IN OTHER STATES AND WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR  
INFLUENCING WAVERERS WITHIN THE PARTY BACK TOWARD FULL  
AND STRONG SUPPORT FOR MRS. GANDHI IN THE MONTHS BEFORE THE  
NATIONAL ELCTION.

7. THIS ANALYSIS INCORPORATES SEVERAL EXCELLENT CONGEN  
BOMBAY MESSAGES ON THE GUJARAT ELECTIONS.  
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